



## “The Pillars” and the Making of the History of Naga City (1960–1970)

Benito B. Caballero Jr.<sup>1,2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Graduate School Student & SHS Faculty, Ateneo de Naga University, Naga City, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>Junior High School Teacher, Camarines Sur National High School, Naga City, Philippines

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### Abstract

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses:

[bcaballerojr@gbox.adnu.edu.ph](mailto:bcaballerojr@gbox.adnu.edu.ph)

(B.B. Caballero)

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This study examines *The Pillars*, the official student publication of Ateneo de Naga University, as a historiographical source for reconstructing the local history of Naga City between 1960 and 1970. While Philippine historiography has traditionally privileged Manila-centered narratives and elite political actors, local publications provide valuable insight into how historical consciousness develops within provincial communities. Through qualitative textual analysis of editorials, reportage, political commentary, and literary texts, this research demonstrates that *The Pillars* functioned not merely as a campus chronicle but as an interpretive forum where students engaged with local governance, electoral politics, natural disasters, religious authority, and national crises such as the Jabidah incident. Drawing on theories of historical consciousness and the politics of historical production, the paper argues that student publications contribute to decentralizing Philippine historiography by preserving contemporaneous interpretations of events at the local level. The findings highlight the importance of provincial youth discourse as an alternative archive that complements institutional records and broadens the evidentiary base for writing local history.

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## Introduction

The writing of Philippine history has long been shaped by narratives centred on Manila, national institutions, and elite political actors. While these accounts remain indispensable for understanding state formation, political transitions, and regime change, they have also contributed to the marginalization of provincial experiences and local voices. The dominance of capital-centred historiography narrows the range of historical actors and archives considered legitimate, often relegating community-level discourse to supplementary status. In recent scholarship, this imbalance has been increasingly challenged by calls to broaden the evidentiary base of Philippine historiography and to recognize local knowledge production as central rather than peripheral (Azada-Palacios, 2024; Takagi, 2021).

Local history, in this context, is not merely a scaled-down version of national history. It is an epistemological intervention that repositions the locality as an interpretive centre. By foregrounding community experiences, institutions, and civic discourse, local history reveals how national developments are interpreted, negotiated, and embodied in specific places. Studies on Philippine heritage governance and cultural policy further show that historical meaning is actively constructed at the local level through institutions, education, and civic engagement (Levina Viray, 2025). Such insights underscore that provincial communities are not passive recipients of national narratives but active participants in shaping historical consciousness.

Within this historiographical reorientation, student publications represent a particularly valuable yet underutilized archive. Campus newspapers function as spaces where youth interpret political developments, articulate moral positions, and frame local issues within broader national debates. Rather than serving solely as chronicles of campus activities, they operate as arenas of civic reasoning and historical narration. Theoretical perspectives on historical consciousness emphasize that history is constructed through narrative processes that link experience, present conditions, and future aspirations (Rüsen, 2004). Editorials, political commentaries, and literary works in student publications are precisely the discursive forms through which such narrative linkages are forged.

Moreover, contemporary research highlights that youth political engagement whether through print, digital, or hybrid platforms has long been central to Philippine civic life (Agojo, 2023). Student discourse often anticipates, reflects, or reframes national crises, offering insight into

how emerging generations conceptualize justice, governance, and responsibility. At the same time, as Trouillot (1995) reminds us, historical production is shaped by power structures that determine what becomes recorded and preserved. Recognizing student publications as historiographical sources therefore requires critical engagement with both their evidentiary richness and their institutional context.

This study examines *The Pillars*, the official student publication of Ateneo de Naga University, as a source for reconstructing the local history of Naga City from 1960 to 1970. The decade was marked by rapid social transformation, electoral contestation, infrastructural challenges, and increasing national political tensions. In provincial cities such as Naga, these national developments intersected with local governance concerns, religious authority, urban vulnerability, and evolving civic identities. Through qualitative textual analysis of selected issues of *The Pillars*, this paper argues that the publication functioned not only as a recorder of events but also as a site of historical production in which students interpreted and shaped local narratives.

By situating *The Pillars* within broader debates on historiography, historical consciousness, and local knowledge production, this research contributes to the decentralization of Philippine historical writing. It affirms that provincial student publications are legitimate historical archives and that youth discourse constitutes a meaningful layer in reconstructing local pasts. In doing so, the study advances a more democratic and inclusive approach to writing Philippine history one that recognizes the intellectual labour of students as part of the nation's historical record.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Philippine Historiography and the Question of the Centre**

Philippine historiography has undergone significant transformation over the past five decades. Early nationalist scholarship expanded historical focus beyond colonial narratives, emphasizing Filipino agency and popular movements (Ileto, 1979; Scott, 1982). Later works further complicated the intellectual landscape by foregrounding regional thinkers and provincial intellectual traditions, demonstrating that knowledge production was not monopolized by Manila elites (Mojares, 2006). These interventions collectively challenged colonial epistemologies and broadened the archive of historical sources.

Despite these advances, historiographical practice has often remained capital-centered in emphasis. The structuring of archives, institutional memory, and scholarly attention continues to privilege national-level institutions and metropolitan actors. Takagi (2021) notes that local political transformation in the Philippines reveals patterns and dynamics that complicate centralized narratives, yet these local histories remain unevenly integrated into mainstream historiography. This structural imbalance underscores the importance of provincial archives and community-generated texts in reconstructing historical experience.

Decolonial scholarship further deepens this critique by arguing that the marginalization of local knowledge reflects enduring epistemic hierarchies (Azada-Palacios, 2024). Historical writing is not simply about recovering facts; it involves determining whose narratives are granted legitimacy. Recognizing local publications as valid historical sources therefore constitutes both a methodological and epistemological intervention.

### **Local History and Community-Based Archives**

Local history scholarship emphasizes the role of community institutions in preserving and shaping historical memory. Perez and Templanza (2012) demonstrate how local studies centres in the Philippines function as repositories of tangible and intangible heritage, integrating archival work with community engagement. These centres reveal that local memory is curated not only through official documents but also through newspapers, organizational records, and cultural texts.

Recent discussions of heritage governance likewise show that historical meaning is actively negotiated at the local level. Levina Viray (2025) argues that national heritage policies are frequently interpreted and contested within local institutional contexts, illustrating how cultural memory is shaped through localized discourse and implementation. Such findings reinforce the idea that provincial archives including student publications are not peripheral supplements to national records but central arenas where historical narratives are constructed and contested.

Within educational contexts, Agon (2021) highlights the pedagogical and civic value of local historical knowledge in fostering community awareness. Although focused primarily on local history education, the study underscores that localized narratives strengthen historical consciousness by linking national events to lived experiences. This connection between locality and narrative formation is particularly relevant for examining student publications.

## **Historical Consciousness and Narrative Formation**

The theoretical concept of historical consciousness provides an important analytical lens for this study. Rüsen (2004) defines historical consciousness as the narrative structure through which individuals interpret temporal experience by connecting past events to present conditions and future expectations. This framework shifts attention from history as a static record to history as a dynamic process of meaning-making.

Recent syntheses in history education research further elaborate that historical consciousness is socially constructed and mediated through discourse (Popa, 2022). Newspapers, editorials, and literary texts are among the discursive forms through which communities negotiate temporal meaning. In student publications, editorial writing often articulates moral positions and civic expectations, thereby linking contemporary events with broader narratives of justice, responsibility, and reform.

However, the production of historical narratives is inseparable from power relations. Trouillot (1995) argues that silences enter historical production at multiple moments from fact creation to archival preservation and retrospective narration. Student publications must therefore be read critically: they preserve valuable contemporaneous interpretations, yet they also reflect institutional constraints, editorial policies, and socio-economic positioning of contributors.

## **Youth Political Engagement and Media**

Youth participation has historically played a central role in Philippine political life. Although scholarship often focuses on student activism in major universities in Manila, recent research highlights the broader landscape of youth civic engagement across different media environments (Agojo, 2023). These studies demonstrate that young people actively interpret political developments and shape public discourse through various communicative platforms.

Historically, print-based student journalism served as one of the primary venues for youth engagement prior to the digital era. Campus newspapers functioned as semi-public spheres in which students articulated critique, expressed solidarity, and framed local issues in national terms. Even within religious institutions, student publications have documented tensions between authority and reform, revealing complex negotiations between faith, education, and civic responsibility.

Yet, while there is scholarship on prominent Manila-based student publications, there remains limited systematic study of provincial campus newspapers as historiographical sources. This gap is significant because provincial student discourse can illuminate how national crises were interpreted outside the capital and how local governance concerns were framed within broader democratic debates.

### **Situating *The Pillars* within the Literature**

The existing literature provides three key foundations for this study. First, historiographical scholarship legitimizes the use of nontraditional and provincial archives in reconstructing national and local history. Second, theoretical work on historical consciousness explains how narrative texts such as editorials and poems contribute to shaping collective temporal understanding. Third, research on youth engagement demonstrates that student discourse constitutes an important dimension of civic life.

However, few studies have systematically examined provincial student publications as primary sources for writing local history. By analyzing *The Pillars* (1960–1970), this research addresses this gap and contributes to decentralizing Philippine historiography. It positions student journalism not merely as commentary but as a site of knowledge production through which local narratives of governance, disaster, morality, and political responsibility were articulated and preserved.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative historical research design grounded in textual analysis. It treats *The Pillars*, the official student publication of Ateneo de Naga University, as both a primary historical source and a site of narrative production. Rather than approaching the publication merely as a chronicle of campus activities, the study examines it as a discursive space where students interpreted local and national developments and articulated civic and moral positions.

The methodological orientation is informed by historiographical source criticism and discourse analysis. Historical texts are not viewed as neutral containers of information but as structured narratives shaped by context, authorship, and institutional positioning (Trouillot, 1995). At the same time, narrative texts such as editorials and literary pieces are treated as expressions of

historical consciousness, linking present events with broader moral and political frameworks (Rüsen, 2004). This dual perspective allows the study to analyze *The Pillars* both as documentation of events and as interpretive intervention.

### **Corpus and Source Selection**

The corpus consists of selected issues of *The Pillars* published between 1960 and 1970. This decade was chosen because it represents a transitional period in Philippine political and social history characterized by electoral contestation, growing student activism, infrastructural challenges, and intensifying national political tensions. The period also predates the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, allowing analysis of student discourse before formal authoritarian consolidation.

Issues were selected based on availability in university archives and relevance to major local and national developments during the period. Particular attention was given to issues containing substantial editorial sections, political commentary, and coverage of significant events such as local elections, civic controversies, disasters, and nationally prominent incidents. The study acknowledges that archival gaps such as missing issues or incomplete metadata may affect representational completeness; however, the available materials provide sufficient textual density for thematic analysis.

### **Analytical Framework**

The analysis proceeded through thematic coding and contextual interpretation. Texts were categorized into four primary genres:

1. **Editorials**, which represent institutional or collective student positions.
2. **News reports**, which document events and developments.
3. **Political commentary and opinion columns**, which provide interpretive and evaluative discourse.
4. **Literary texts**, including poems and short prose pieces reflecting affective and symbolic engagement with social issues.

A preliminary reading identified recurring themes, including:

- Local governance and civic accountability

- Electoral integrity and political morality
- Urban vulnerability and disaster response
- Religious authority and institutional critique
- Youth responsibility and civic engagement
- National crises and state legitimacy

These thematic clusters were refined through iterative close reading. Each text was examined for narrative structure, rhetorical framing, and moral positioning. Rather than isolating statements as factual data, the analysis focused on how events were framed, what language was employed to assign responsibility, and how temporal connections between past, present, and future were constructed.

### **Contextualization and Triangulation**

To strengthen historical interpretation, findings from *The Pillars* were contextualized within broader scholarship on Philippine historiography, youth political engagement, and local governance. Secondary literature provided interpretive scaffolding to situate student discourse within regional and national political developments. This contextualization does not replace archival triangulation but supports responsible interpretation by aligning textual findings with established historical research.

The study recognizes that student publications reflect particular social positions namely, educated youth within a Catholic university environment. Consequently, the analysis does not treat *The Pillars* as a comprehensive representation of Naga City's entire population. Instead, it positions the publication as one layer within a multi-voiced local historical landscape.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the publication reflects institutional and editorial mediation. Student discourse may have been shaped by school policies, cultural expectations, or implicit censorship, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Second, the socio-economic background of contributors likely influenced thematic emphasis and perspective. Third, incomplete archival records limit quantitative generalization about frequency or continuity of themes.

However, these limitations do not diminish the historiographical value of the source. Rather, they reinforce the need for critical reading and contextual awareness, consistent with established principles of historical source analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study relies exclusively on publicly available archival materials. As historical texts produced for public circulation, the materials do not involve private or confidential data. Nevertheless, interpretive caution is maintained to avoid projecting contemporary assumptions onto historical actors. The analysis seeks to understand the texts within their temporal and institutional context.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of *The Pillars* (1960–1970) reveals that the publication functioned as more than a campus newsletter; it operated as a discursive arena where local realities were documented, interpreted, and morally framed. The findings demonstrate that student journalism in Naga City actively participated in the production of historical consciousness by linking local experiences with broader national transformations. Four dominant thematic clusters emerge from the corpus: (1) local governance and civic accountability, (2) disaster and urban vulnerability, (3) electoral integrity and democratic anxiety, and (4) national crises refracted through provincial youth discourse.

### **Local Governance and Civic Accountability**

A recurring theme in *The Pillars* during the 1960s is concern over local leadership, public administration, and civic responsibility. Editorials frequently evaluated city governance not merely in technical terms but through a moral vocabulary of integrity, responsibility, and service. This framing reflects what Rüsen (2004) describes as narrative orientation where contemporary events are interpreted within broader moral and temporal frameworks. Governance was not presented as an abstract administrative function but as an ethical commitment tied to the future of the community.

In discussions of municipal decisions, infrastructural concerns, and administrative conduct, the publication positioned students as legitimate commentators on public affairs. This positioning complicates assumptions that political discourse in the provinces was dominated exclusively

by established elites. Instead, the student press reveals a localized public sphere in which educated youth engaged critically with civic life.

This finding aligns with scholarship on local political transformation in the Philippines, which emphasizes that provincial political arenas often reflect complex negotiations between reform, patronage, and civic expectation (Takagi, 2021). Rather than being passive observers of national politics, local actors actively interpreted governance within their immediate social context. *The Pillars* demonstrates that student discourse formed part of this interpretive ecosystem.

### **Disaster, Urban Vulnerability, and Public Accountability**

Coverage of natural disasters particularly flooding illustrates how the publication transformed environmental events into political narratives. Rather than describing floods solely as acts of nature, articles framed them as indicators of urban planning limitations, infrastructural inadequacies, and leadership responsibility. This interpretive move is significant because it demonstrates how local publications convert environmental events into moments of civic evaluation.

Disaster coverage thus functioned as an archive of lived urban experience. It preserved not only descriptions of submerged streets or disrupted services but also the interpretive lens through which students assessed vulnerability and response. In doing so, *The Pillars* contributed to constructing a narrative of Naga City as a community confronting structural challenges that required both administrative reform and collective responsibility.

Such framing reflects broader insights from heritage and governance scholarship, which shows that local institutions actively shape how communities interpret crises and public memory (Levina Viray, 2025). In this case, the student publication became a mediator of civic memory, preserving how disasters were understood in real time and embedding them within a discourse of accountability.

### **Electoral Integrity and Democratic Anxiety**

Electoral cycles during the 1960s generated sustained commentary in *The Pillars*, particularly regarding issues of fairness, corruption, and democratic legitimacy. Editorial language frequently invoked concepts such as integrity, conscience, and moral duty, suggesting that

elections were understood not merely as procedural exercises but as ethical benchmarks for civic maturity.

This moral framing is historically significant. It reveals how provincial student discourse internalized and localized national anxieties about democratic decline during the late 1960s. Rather than treating electoral irregularities as distant political spectacles, *The Pillars* connected them directly to the moral fabric of local society. The student body was encouraged to adopt vigilance and ethical discernment, positioning youth as guardians of democratic values.

The presence of such discourse supports arguments that youth political consciousness in the Philippines extended beyond metropolitan campuses (Agojo, 2023). While scholarship often highlights student activism in Manila, the evidence from *The Pillars* suggests that provincial institutions were also sites of political reflection and normative debate.

From a historiographical perspective, these texts preserve the moral expectations attached to democratic processes in Naga City before the imposition of Martial Law. They therefore provide valuable insight into the political atmosphere preceding authoritarian consolidation.

### **National Crises and the Provincial Imagination**

National political crises, including high-profile incidents and controversies, were addressed in *The Pillars* with notable moral intensity. Rather than treating such events as distant occurrences confined to the capital, the publication framed them as matters of collective ethical concern. Students articulated solidarity, critique, and responsibility in response to national developments, thereby integrating provincial discourse into the national moral conversation.

This pattern reinforces the argument that local historical consciousness is shaped through interaction with national narratives. Historical production does not occur solely at the site of the event but also in the interpretive communities that receive and reinterpret it. As Trouillot (1995) reminds us, history is produced not only in the moment of occurrence but in the moments of narration and archiving. *The Pillars* represents one such narrating site, preserving how national crises were filtered through provincial youth perspectives.

Importantly, the discourse in the publication reveals a tension between institutional identity and critical engagement. As a Catholic university publication, *The Pillars* operated within a moral framework shaped by religious and educational values. Yet this framework did not preclude

critique; rather, it often intensified it by grounding political evaluation in ethical reasoning. The interplay between faith, civic duty, and political commentary illustrates how provincial student publications negotiated authority while maintaining space for dissent.

### **Literary Texts and Affective Historical Memory**

Beyond editorials and reportage, literary texts published in *The Pillars* provide insight into the affective climate of the period. Poems and reflective prose pieces expressed disillusionment, moral uncertainty, and aspirations for reform. These texts are historiographically significant because they capture emotional dimensions of social experience that are often absent from official records.

Recent scholarship on historical consciousness emphasizes that narrative meaning is shaped not only by rational argument but also by affect and symbolic language (Popa, 2022). Literary contributions in *The Pillars* thus function as qualitative evidence of the moral atmosphere in Naga City during a decade of transition. They reveal how students experienced uncertainty, frustration, and hope emotions that shaped civic engagement and collective memory.

### **Historiographical Implications**

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *The Pillars* served as both recorder and constructor of local history. It documented events while simultaneously shaping interpretive frameworks through which those events were understood. The publication preserved contemporaneous evaluations of governance, disaster response, electoral integrity, and national crises—dimensions often underrepresented in formal institutional archives.

At the same time, critical awareness of representational limits remains essential. The voices preserved in *The Pillars* reflect a specific institutional and socio-educational milieu. As Trouillot (1995) argues, historical production inevitably includes silences shaped by power and structure. The absence of certain community sectors from the publication underscores the need for triangulation with other sources, including oral histories and municipal records.

Nevertheless, the historiographical value of *The Pillars* lies precisely in its situated perspective. Rather than claiming comprehensive representation, it offers insight into how educated provincial youth conceptualized their city's past and future. By incorporating such student

discourse into local historical reconstruction, scholars can expand the evidentiary base of Philippine historiography and further decentre Manila-centric narratives.

## Conclusions

This study demonstrates that *The Pillars* (1960–1970) can be utilized as a valuable historiographical source in reconstructing the local history of Naga City. Through its editorials, reportage, political commentary, and literary texts, the publication documented not only events but also the moral and civic frameworks through which students interpreted governance, elections, disasters, and national crises. The findings show that provincial student publications function as sites of historical consciousness, where local experiences are linked to broader national developments. Although the perspectives preserved in *The Pillars* reflect a specific institutional context, they offer important insight into how educated youth engaged with public life during a decade of political transformation. By incorporating student journalism into historical analysis, this study contributes to the decentralization of Philippine historiography and affirms the significance of local youth discourse in shaping collective memory and civic identity.

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